

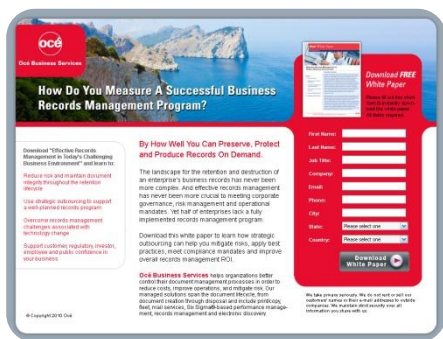


EXCEPTIONAL LANDING PAGES

*PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR OPTIMIZING
YOUR MARKETING CAMPAIGN FULFILLMENT*

ABSTRACT »

Your landing pages should be exceptional. Why? Because they're where your marketing dollars become sales leads, transactions, community members or whatever you define to be the ultimate goal of your campaigns. This may seem like an obvious truism, but I'm constantly finding landing pages that just don't cut it. What's going wrong is a lack of investment in high-quality creative execution combined with a fundamental misunderstanding of what landing pages can do well and what they can't. In this white paper, I'll share the lessons I've learned in overhauling hundreds of landing pages, and watching the positive impact of their repositioning and redesign on campaign performance. I'll also provide a checklist for assessing your landing pages, so that you can quickly identify opportunities for improvement.



This landing page from Océ Business Services stays focused on communicating the key value of the white paper being offered. It's totally in line with the principle of even exchange with a no-frills summary of what's contained in the offer, an easy-to-complete form, a compelling call-to-action and a clear privacy statement.

01. WHAT IS A TRANSACTIONAL LANDING PAGE?

The term “landing page” can be used in reference to a wide variety of web pages, from home pages to press releases. Wikipedia defines a landing page as, “the page that appears when a potential customer clicks on an advertisement or a search engine result link.” Anything you’ve posted online anywhere for any reason could fit this loose definition.

For the purposes of this white paper, I’ll be giving advice strictly on transactional landing pages, which, again according to Wikipedia, “seek to persuade a visitor to complete a transaction such as filling out a form or interacting with advertisements or other objects on the landing page, with the goal being the immediate or eventual sale of a product or service.” Because they are created with a specific purpose in mind, an investment in their improvement can quickly and measurably impact the performance of a targeted marketing campaign.

Generic landing pages that fit the looser definition, like your website homepage, certainly can be made more effective with a strategic investment. Advice on how to accomplish this, however, is the subject of a larger discussion on website optimization.

02. GO TRANSACTIONAL OR GO HOME.

When I hear a loose application of the term, “landing page,” used interchangeably between generic informational web pages and those designed specifically to encourage a transaction, I almost always find a lack of attention to the fulfillment piece of a company’s marketing and advertising efforts. A generic landing page may be effective at accomplishing what it was designed to do: Disseminating information, communicating brand, inviting interaction etc. A transactional landing page may be effective at facilitating transactions. The generic-page/transactional-landing-page hybrid, however, has too many purposes to accomplish any of them well.

The bottom line is that for demand generation, because nothing can be measured as ROI until some kind of transaction occurs—whether it is downloading a white paper, filling out a web form, or completing a shopping cart process—a purpose-built transactional landing page(s) is the only path to achieving optimal ROI.

An effective transactional landing page is a final destination; there’s no more searching to be done because it is specifically designed to be the end of the marketing program it serves. No matter how much you dress it up, if you’re primary goal is something other than converting web traffic into new prospects or sales, like building brand awareness or pre-qualifying sales leads, you’re diminishing what your landing page should be primarily focused on—being an effective transactional mechanism.



Purpose-built transactional landing pages may also be effective in a business-to-consumer campaign. This landing page from Emerson is targeted at prospects close to making a purchase decision. It facilitates a single focus: offering the visitor added value with a highly actionable price promotion.

03. IT'S ALL ABOUT THE OFFER.

To put it plainly, the success of a landing page mostly depends on the quality and appropriateness of the offer—I'd say it's at least 80% of the equation in most cases. Since your landing page's purpose is to encourage a transaction, it's critical to create a perception of even exchange. You should offer your visitor something of equal or greater value to what you're asking of them.

For this to happen, your offer should line up to your visitor's needs and where they are in the buying cycle. Free trials, product demos and price promotions can be very effective for prospects late in the buying cycle, close to making a purchase decision. Conversely, webinars, white papers and product reviews may work well for early-stage prospects still investigating products or services in an effort to make an informed decision. What will work for your target audience and your buying cycle will undoubtedly be unique, and testing is really the only good way to know for certain.

04. CHECK OUT THIS LANDING PAGE CHECKLIST.

Once you've found the right offer, it's time to focus on the other 20%—how well you present the offer and how easy it is for the visitor to take the plunge and transact. Though the quality and relevancy of your offer is the key motivating factor, even a small change in conversion rate on your landing page can mean a huge uptick in your marketing campaign results, so this 20% is definitely worth going after.

Ask yourself the following to determine if you're maximizing the effectiveness of your landing pages and taking full advantage of your offer's ability to encourage a transaction:

- A. **Is your offer aligned with the needs of your target audience?** Is it compelling to your prospects in consideration of where they are in the buying cycle?
- B. **Is your offer overly self-serving in subject matter?** Does it promise real value to your visitor with highly relevant, current and useful information, actionable content or functionality?
- C. **Are you violating the rule of even exchange by asking your visitor for too much?** If you have more than eight form fields to fill out, or a multi-step checkout process, are those extra fields or steps necessary? Are you asking for information that is potentially irrelevant or unnecessary? (A landing page is a bad place to do lead qualification)
- D. **Are you conveying the full value of your offer?** Are there images of the offer, call-outs and examples of the important information or functionality it contains? Does the offer look appealing and of high value?
- E. **Are the headlines, copy and graphics arresting and persuasive?** Could they do a better job of selling the visitor on the offer? Are they

trying to educate or sell the visitor on your product/business/services in general terms, rather than staying offer-focused?

- F. **Are the critical elements of the page easy to find and above the fold (visible without scrolling down)?** Does this include the form, offer image, key value proposition and/or call-to-action?
- G. **Is the copy written so it is easy to scan with bullets and call-outs?** Is the most important, offer-focused copy on top?
- H. **Is there a clear and legible privacy statement?**
- I. **Is there a single, clear call-to action?** Does it compete with other interactive elements of the page such as unrelated site navigation?

05. ONE MAN'S TREASURE IS ANOTHER'S TRASH.

Despite the best-practices implied by these questions, there's really no single template that can be applied to every landing page to make it perform better. Innovation is essential in both your offer and landing page. If most of your competitors offer a white paper about a particular topic, offer a webinar that gives a fresh perspective on the subject. Experiment with changing the information you require in order to access your offers, or try adding an incentive. Above all, test what works best for your target audience. Respect the principal of even exchange, and you will reap the reward of eager potential customers in your sales pipeline.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Justin Barton directs creative strategy, design, development and copywriting for Newspeed, Inc. He has lead the creation of marketing and branding programs for over 11 years producing websites, micro-sites, email marketing, flash animations, sales collateral, advertising, direct mail and more.

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